

still a persistent achievement gap in many of our Nation's schools with respect to low-income and minority students. The nationwide high school graduation rate hovers around 70 percent and is even lower for students of color and low-income students. This is unacceptable and is a matter of fairness and equality that must be addressed. We can do better. We must do better. The future of our country rests on our efforts. Federal, State and local governments must work together to continue to support our educators and help ensure that every child has access to good teachers and high-quality schools.

That is why I am looking forward to working with educators as Congress undertakes the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind. We now have the opportunity to rethink the proper role for the Federal Government in education reform and how we can best support States and school districts as they continue to work to educate all our Nation's children and close the persistent achievement gap that still exists in too many of our Nation's schools. We need to work together to solve problems, strengthen our public school system, and make certain that all our students receive the education they deserve.

As Chief Justice Warren wrote when he delivered the opinion of the Supreme Court in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

More than 50 years later, these words still ring true, and as we celebrate American Education Week, let us honor the outstanding work that our Nation's educators do every day and recommit ourselves to working with these educators to address the continued inequities in American education so that all children, regardless of their background, can receive a high-quality public education.

#### COMBATING HUNGER

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, as we prepare to depart for the Thanksgiving break, I wish to thank those who work to combat hunger in this country and to commend the administration for its goal of eliminating child hunger by 2015. I encourage the administration to

work with Congress to find solutions to achieve this goal and end hunger in America.

We must commit ourselves to solving this crisis. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has just released findings that 14.6 percent of Americans were "food insecure," up from 11.1 percent in 2007. Food insecurity is measured by the number of persons who experience hunger at some point during the year because they could not afford enough food.

The Agriculture Department also found that one-third of these households had what the researchers called "very low food security," which means that they were forced to skip meals or cut portions. The other two-thirds of households got by only through reliance on food stamps, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

The nearly 4 percent increase in food insecurity between 2007 and 2008 is the largest since USDA began reporting hunger statistics in 1995. Even more disturbing, USDA reports that nearly 17 million children live in households where food was scarce at some point during the last year. This figure amounts to more than one out of every five children in the United States.

An astonishing 1.1 million children went to sleep hungry at some point in 2008—a 36-percent increase from 2007. In my State of Maryland, more than 135,000 children currently live in food insecure households. Sixty-three thousand of these children are under the age of 5.

No child should ever know what it means to be hungry. Childhood hunger hinders development in the long term, and children who are hungry have difficulty learning and are at much higher risk to be in poverty as adults. Hunger negatively affects children's behavior, school performance, and cognitive development.

As we celebrate this holiday season, it is important to reflect on how each of us can support our communities. In my home State, the employees and volunteers at the Maryland Food Bank provide 14 million pounds of food annually to those in need. Working with more than 1,000 partner organizations, including soup kitchens, senior centers, daycare centers and afterschool programs, the food bank works to fill unmet needs of Maryland families. In these difficult economic times, the services of the Maryland Food Bank are more important than ever.

During the past year, the staff at the food bank's facilities in Baltimore and Salisbury saw demand increase by 50 percent. Middle-class families who a year ago made donations to the food bank are now turning to the organization to put food on their own tables.

Americans with full-time jobs are the fastest growing cohort of those in need. As unemployment continues to rise, families are being forced to spend their savings and are too quickly moving from middle to low income. America's working poor are most at risk. They

live from paycheck to paycheck and have no safety net if their company downsizes or their hours are cut. When money is short, Americans are forced to make excruciating choices.

It is estimated that one-third of Marylanders relying on food assistance must choose between buying food and paying utility bills. Fifty-three percent of those who receive food assistance have unpaid medical bills. The number of working poor families in Maryland is 70 percent higher than it was two decades ago.

In addition to the food bank, I also want to highlight the work of employees at the many social service agencies across our State. These dedicated workers devote their time and energy to helping their community and work side-by-side with the Maryland Food Bank and other organizations to provide meals and services to those in need.

For example, the Maryland Department of Education works closely with the Maryland Food Bank on several projects that provide students with nutritious meals. More than 303,000 Maryland children rely on free or reduced-price meals in schools. Through the Backpack Program, the food bank provides schools such as Baltimore Highlands Elementary with backpacks filled with food. Children receive the backpacks on Friday afternoons to ensure they are not hungry over the weekend.

Kids Cafe is an innovative partnership between the food bank, the Maryland Department of Education, and local afterschool programs that provides nutritious meals and teaches children how to make healthful food choices.

Our seniors are also at risk of food insecurity at much higher levels than the general population. I applaud efforts such as the SNAP Outreach Program in Maryland, which is a partnership between the USDA and local organizations to help register seniors for food assistance programs.

Despite these efforts, we need to do more. In my State alone, it would take 82 million pounds of food to support the more than 350,000 Marylanders in need every year.

We must recommit ourselves to serving our communities and work together to support those in need during these difficult times.

So as Senators and staff leave Washington for their home States and prepare to give thanks and enjoy the company of family and friends, I encourage us all to show our support for those who work daily to make mealtime possible for millions of Americans in need.

#### 225TH BIRTHDAY OF FORMER PRESIDENT ZACHARY TAYLOR

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the 225th anniversary of the birth of MG Zachary Taylor, a Virginia native son and the 12th President of the United States of America.